

**Remarks by Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield
Luncheon with 10,000 Women Entrepreneurs
December 2, 2009
Cuttington University Graduate School**

Greetings Dr. Naame,
Mr. Sam Mitchell and Mr. Brian King,
And especially warm greetings to the 26 businesswomen here today:

It is a real honor to be here today with you and celebrate your hard work, courage and dedication to your country. As you near next Saturday's graduation, I encourage you to think of your training as a beginning, rather than an end, to this journey. Because it is you – the women business leaders of today and tomorrow – who will be the architects of a new Liberia.

The U.S. Embassy wholeheartedly believes that entrepreneurs are the backbone of a proud, independent Liberia. It is you who will contribute to a Liberia where *all* Liberians, men *and* women, can find dignity in employment. And it is the small and medium business owners who will provide the ingenuity, the goods and services, the jobs and the local know-how that will encourage foreign investment, promote industrialization, and break the chains of Liberia's import dependency.

But beyond the impact you make as a group, the contributions that you make individually as business owners have real-world social benefits. Ms. Angela Davis and Ms. Clarissa Deline: your pharmacies ensure that your neighbors stay healthy and have access to safe medicines. Ms. Alberta Port-Jones: your rubber purchasing business helps local farmers replenish idle rubber farms. And Ms. Tina Kpan: your innovative fashions will help show the world that Liberia can export its beautiful textiles. There are of course other examples: Josephine Francis &

Keko Flemister – the farmers of the future, or Hesta Baker-Pearson – editor of Liberian Travel & Life.

Your ambitions and your potential are the reasons why the United States proudly partners with Liberia. Since the end of civil conflict in 2003, we have provided over \$2 billion of assistance in Liberia. This year alone, we will spend \$51 million to rebuild this country's private sector, because as we have seen in so many African nations, there is no assurance of lasting peace unless people have jobs, dignity, and food on the table. We are working with the government to turn on the lights, bringing electricity to Monrovia and beyond. We will help to increase agricultural production and food security by introducing improved seed varieties and building farm-to-market roads. And we will promote private enterprise and expand access to credit for ordinary men and women, farmers and entrepreneurs.

But we cannot do it alone. In the end, this is *your* country and *your* economy. In Liberia, the United States is your guest and your friend. We stand ready to support *your* leadership, but it is you who must be the true agents of change. Let it be known that the voices of entrepreneurs must be heard in the move to “Lift Liberia”!

In the United States, the business community plays a crucial role in government decision-making and ensures legislation and policies that strengthen the private sector. I know that your businesses consume every waking moment of your day, but your business cannot succeed unless you carve out some time to work jointly with the government to improve the environment for *all* Liberian businesses.

Together, there is much that you can do. I urge you to speak out against the culture of corruption that discourages investment and cheats you of hard-earned revenues. Believe me – you as Liberians are more victims to this than your foreign counterpart. Demand that the Legislature draft business-friendly laws. Press your government to renovate the run-down port, so that your goods can move quickly to market. Lobby on behalf of your Government but lobby on your own behalf's. This is what private Government partnership is about. Agitate for social investment, and ask your government to create the kind of education system that ensure literacy, provides valuable technical skills, and ensures all citizens can find a job. Be proactive and involved. Make sure your business reflect what you want people to think of you. If I walk into your business and there is garbage in front of your door, I will think that what you are doing inside is garbage too. Let me think there is someone who cares about their business:

1. Cleanliness
2. Be honest
3. Be concerned about customer service
4. Be a model and a mentor

As you graduate from this training, and return to your businesses full-time, you will face challenges and frustrations on your path to success. But you need not face these alone. Look around the room. Here are your professors, who helped you design a solid business plan. And here are your LiBA mentors, who will guide you in its execution. But most importantly, here are 25 other women, strong and determined and ready to succeed. Even as you leave this classroom, and return to your businesses in ELWA or Redlight or Paynesville, I encourage you to stay in touch. If you can continue to give each other the friendship, moral support and

tough love that have helped you reach this point, I am certain that you will achieve success for your business and your country.

My government and the American people are proud to walk with you on this journey, to be your partner, your friend, and to work with you to realize the full potential of Liberia, its businesses and its people.

Following this prestigious training, your family, friends, business partners and even business rivals will look to you as a leader. I challenge you to fulfill that role, to give back to your community what you have received from this training. Relish the important social and civic role that business leaders can – and I believe must -- play.

I wish you every success and look forward to becoming one of your customers and clients. Congratulations!